

THE CONCEPT OF NON-VIOLENCE IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHIES

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Non-Violence in Indian Philosophies

For understanding non-violence we shall have to understand the meaning of violence. What is violence? Webster's English Dictionary has seven distinct meanings of violence. Basically, it refers to "roughness in action", a physical force used so as to injure or damage. Another meaning is "unjust use of force or power". Yet in another sense violence refers to "distortion of meaning". Oxford English Dictionary offers a more restrictive definition that it is the "exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or damage to persons or property". It is clear that there are several variables, some explicit and others not so explicit, that qualify violence and consequently what constitutes violence becomes a matter of considerable debate and a consensual definition more difficult to arrive at. If violence, as we find in another edition of Oxford English Dictionary, is "behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill", then, how about psychological violence such as verbal assault or "tongue-lashing" that has unmistakable effect on the victims.

The concept of non-violence assumes a peculiar character in the *Gita*. Non-violence and violence depends wholly upon the circumstances. The decision between the two, is a thorny problem, for, "*kim karma kim akarme, ti kavavo, py atra mohitah*"—sages too are perplexed as to what is action, what inaction.¹ Tilak has referred to the dilemma of Hamlet in arising at the decision.² Right sense of action is clouded with the conflicting duties raging in the mind of the doer. Non-violence has been accepted as a moral principle but moral principles are not an end in themselves. It is only through religious devotion to one's duty, that one can attain the highest bliss.

Jainism holds fast to the five moral principles for the achievement of the purification of soul. Ahimsa occupies the first place and the four other

principles—*satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacharya*, *aparigraha* are subservient to it. They are only duties and could be adjusted in the interest of non-violence. Any of the four moral principles could be disregarded if such regard was necessitated by the principle of non-violence.³

In Buddhism non-violence has its positive counterpart. It demands not only abstention from injury but also the practice of loving kindness, "*metta*" to all.⁴ In his sermon at Banaras, Buddha said, "By the practice of loving kindness I have attained liberation of heart".⁵ In his sermon to *Anathapindaka*, Buddha, said, "We reach the immoral path only by continuous acts of kindness and we perfect our souls by compassion and charity."⁶

There are stories, fables and maxims in support of non-violence scattered through the Mahabharata, non-violence is extolled as the highest form of religion. Bhisma the old hero and the statesman, exalted non-violence in his consolatory preaching to Yuddhisthra. "Non-violence is the highest religion. It is the highest penance. It is also the highest truth from which all duty proceeds. Kapila also holds the moral principles of kindness, forgiveness, peacefulness, non-violence and truth etc. as the road leading to Brahman (self-realization).

"Non-violence" wrote Mahatma Gandhi, Is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed.⁷ Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man".⁸ At another occasion, he said that non-violence has got to be all 'pervasive'. One cannot be non-violent about one of his activities and violent about others.⁹ Indeed non-violence was a cardinal virtue around which the whole life and all the activities of the Mahatma revolved.

Impact of Non-violence over Violence

No one really disputes that non-violence resolution of conflict is preferable to violence (except perhaps those who see the evolutionary need for population control through violence and war). However, the question is whether non-violence can indeed be effective as a means of conflict resolution. Most people have reasonable doubts whether current terrorism or

naxalism can be tackled by non-violent means. Therefore, it is felt, violence is indeed as a sort of necessary evil to maintain stability and order in society and that aggression and love would continue to necessarily co-exist. Gandhiji would of course challenge this on two grounds. First, the Mahatma strongly believe that non-violence is not only morally violence but that is also functioning more effective as a force and instrument of social action. He asserted that, "Violence cannot remain unaffected before non-violence".¹⁰

If we want to see non-violence, peace and development together, we have to understand that economics, social stability, personal well being—all of these must develop together and be developed in a constant consciousness of peace. Importantly, the answers to these questions can be found out primarily through dialogue and self examination. There has to be a dialogue between those from different disciplines and professions, between people from different countries and regions, between the rich and the poor and between the oppressed and oppressors. A gathering of this kind, provides an appropriate form for initiating such dialogues.

"Satyagraha" literary means holding to truth. In practice, it is non-violent action to resolve social as well as individual conflicts. It may take a number of forms such as non-cooperation, civil disobedience and fasting, depending upon the nature of the conflict situation. Gandhiji has not prescribed a set theory to go by, and he has repeatedly emphasized that his techniques are essentially experimental in character. The basic assumption underlying *satyagraha* is that it is possible to generate extensive social action by non-violent means and that this action helps to transform the adversary non-violently when the cause is just. The social action engendered by non-violent techniques is far superior to the action involving violent means, because in the latter case the solution is attended with terrifying consequences that are often beyond the control of the acting agent. Gandhiji, doesn't, however, explicitly state how non-violent action brings this miraculous transformation in the opponent, but the actual operation of *satyagraha*, whatever may be its mysterious force, would seem to involve delicate and human modes of communication.

The mission of non-violence can become successful only when it is imbued with consciousness of spirituality or consciousness of emotions. An

integration of economic development, material development, moral development and spiritual development only can make us eligible to talk about human development. If only intellectual consciousness is developed and if only economic development takes place, then food cannot go together with non-violence and peace. If merely consciousness of spirituality is developed then both non-violence and food cannot go together. A happy blending of intellectual consciousness and spiritual consciousness is indispensable for a balanced, holistic and relative development. Non-violence, peace and food can co-exist only when intellectual consciousness, economic consciousness and spiritual consciousness are developed in a balanced manner.

Non-violence has come to be a creed, a matter of faith rather than simply an experimental instrument of social-action. Violence wrote Gandhiji, "Can be overcome by non-violence. This is clear to me as the proposition that two and two make four. But for this one must have faith. Even a weapon like atom bomb when used against non-violence will prove ineffective".¹¹ Responding to a reported statement of general Cariappa, Gandhiji remarked : It is his (Cariappa's) ignorance of this the greatest duty of the man in the world, which makes him say that in his age non-violence has little scope in the face of violence, whereas I make bold to say that in the age of the atom bomb, unadulterated non-violence is the only force that can confound all the tricks put together of violence.¹²

M.K. Gandhi began as an empiricist conducting a series of experiments for social and political change. However he ended up a thoroughbred moralist who trusted his intuition more than the facts around him. His thoughts on violence and non-violence seem to bear this out. Non-violence came to be the moral imperative, the supreme morality. He stretched the meaning of "violence" to a point that it came to be synonymous with everything that is undesirable and immoral. For the Mahatma, traveling in the train without a ticket is violence,¹³ and over work is violence. He wrote : "The work which becomes a burden or for which we have to overstrain ourselves at the cost of our health amounts to physical violence."

Mahatma Gandhiji and Non-violence

Sixty years ago, on December 3, 1947, general K.M. Cariappa met Mahatma Gandhi and told him that he would like to remind the army and the soldiers in his own way of the need for and value for non-violence. He then asked, "How I can put this over, i.e., the spirit of non-violence to the troops....without endangering their sense of duty to train themselves well professionally as soldiers", to which Gandhiji replied : "I am still groping in the dark for the answer. I will find it and I will give it to you someday."¹⁴ That day never came as he himself was a victim of violence that snatched him away just a few days later. Yet the question, more relevant today than in 1947, remains unanswered. However what is significant in Mahatma's response is that there is indeed an answer and that we would find it sooner or later.

It was testimony of no less a person than Lord Lloyd, Governor General of Bombay, that in the opening months of his campaign, Gandhi came, "With in the breadth of an eyelash" of securing the emancipation of his people. Unconquerable is the non-violent resistant, so powerful the man or movement which wields not the sword of steel but the sword of the spirit. The British Empire, like the Roman empire before it, know exactly what to do with an enemy that comes armed against her. Every empire, every military power has long since learned the lesson of how to handle an attack of violence, whether it by a mob or any army. They have fought their foes through so many years, and under such varieties of circumstance, and to such ends of victory, that they have nothing now to learn. No effective instrument of force and violence is beyond their knowledge and expert use. But when a man, or rather a disciplined army of men, comes against an empire bare-handed and bare-footed, equipped not even with stones and staves, practicing not violence in any form but absolute non-violence, loving their enemies and seeking ways not of destroying but of serving them even as they love and their friends, the empire is helpless.¹⁵ This was a great Gandhiji's training in non-violence.

How can the two opposite evolve together and co-exist in us? It would seem that aggression, selfishness and violence have a short term instrumental value where as love, compassion and non-violence are among

the long-term strategic value defenses to secure survival, safety, cohabitation and co-existence. It would also appear that the latter, viz., love and altruism, have a control function to moderate and attenuate violence in human condition. The co-existence of the opposite appears to have the combined effect of enhancing human survival individually and collectively.

What Gandhi was doing in these creating actions was going to the Indian people the weapons where with to carry on their fight against Britain—weapons of unimaginable power, guaranteed, if used patiently and bravely, to bring victory in conflict, ordinary weapons were of no use to India in her struggle against the greatest military empire since that of ancient Rome. Sword and spear were as useless to a disarmed and untrained people as they were spiritually wrong. If India was to win her fight for freedom, it must be on the higher level of human effort—in this case the weapon of non-violence. Once condemned and ridiculed, now regarded with awe and wonder.¹⁶

Training in Non-violence

According to Acharya Mahapragya, "If we want to develop non-violence we have to pay attention to the right economics, morality and control over desires and emotions. Transformation of personality through meditational practices can alter the emotion of greed that would pave the gateway for safe and peaceful economic development." Acharya Mahapragya believes that unlimited personal wealth and unlimited consumption are the two great challenges of the present world. The two mantras of limited possession and limited consumption, as enunciated by Bhagvan Mahavir, can prove to be extremely effective in creating an egalitarian society.

Once British Empire decided to arrest Gandhi and his multitudinous followers and thrust them behind prison bars. But behind these bars Gandhi became more powerful than ever. In a moment of that charming humor which characterized his life, Gandhi said that he had early discovered that he could make the best bargains with British when he was in jail. Then the mind of the world was focused upon him, and by reason of sympathy demanded a justice which was beyond all reach when he was at large. So

Gandhi in prison was a force more potent than "an army with banners". How to conquer this man and his followers clad only in the panoply of the loin cloth was a question never answered by the British Government.¹⁷ This was Gandhiji's great training in non-violence.

The Journey of non-violence leads to greatness, rising to greater heights and there is an universal observation that it is difficult to soar high and here comes to fore the human exertion or *purusharth* as we may call it. An essential component of non-violence is austerity—the excitement to reach withering heights and embrace the cloud with a silver lining. Those who are addicted to an extravagant and a wanton lifestyle can never experiment with non-violence, because it takes courage to answer a call, it takes courage to give our all-it takes courage to be true. Acharya Mahapragya has embarked upon a journey attempting to create a bridge between economics and non-violence with the help of *anekanta*.¹⁸ Therefore, Acharya Mahapragya proposes that a saint can forgo pleasures, it is expected from him, but spirituality must seep into a family and in a man's life too. He must learn and practice to forgo the worldly pleasures to some extent and embrace non-possession as a way of life. **Non-violence is both a moral and spiritual value.** In its micro form, non-violence is a determination of not retaliating even in the instance of another person attempting to inflict pain, harm and agony on us. It is this unconditional love which forms the spiritual premise of non-violence.

Acharya Mahpragya believes the physiology of human brain as having three layers. The superficial one that we use of reasoning and logicising is the neo-cortex. Beneath it lies the animal brain which when left untrained and untamed contaminates all our developmental efforts with corruption and other such banal tendencies. This require essential training and practice. **The solution of this problem is training in non-violence.**¹⁹ (Acharya Mahapragya message in VII International). More intellectual deliberation would not be enough to provide the solution. Without compassion, non-possessiveness is impossible and without non-possessiveness compassion is impossible.

Conclusion

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As per Oxford English Dictionary meaning of violence is "exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury on or damage to person or property." According to *Gita* non-violence has been accepted as a moral principle but moral principles are not an end in themselves. It is only through religious devotion to one's duty that can attain highest bliss. Jainism holds fast to the five moral principles for the achievement of the purification of soul. Ahimsa occupies the first place and the four other principles—*satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacharya* and *aparigraha* are subservient to it. In Buddhism non-violence has its positive counterpart. It demands not only abstention from injury but also the practice of loving kindness, compassion and charity. As per *Mahabharata*, "Non-violence is the highest religion. It is the highest penance. It is also the highest truth from which all duty proceeds." Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man."

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